

Royal Welsh Agricultural Show

Future of Farming visit note

Date: Tuesday 21 July 2026

Location: Royal Welsh Agricultural Show, Builth Wells, Wales

Attendees

EFRA Committee

- Mr Alistair Carmichael MP (Chair)
- Sarah Bool MP
- Henry Tufnell MP

Purpose of the visit

As part of its ongoing thematic inquiries into the Future of farming, Food supply chain resilience and fairness, and Biosecurity and animal welfare, the Committee visited the Royal Welsh Show in Builth Wells. Over the summer, the Committee has visited various agricultural shows, including one in each of the devolved nations.

The purpose of attending the show was to hear from stakeholders about the issues for farmers and farm businesses in Wales. Whilst at the show, the Committee met with representatives from the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society, NFU Cymru, CLA Cymru, and the Farmers Union of Wales (FUW). They also held a meeting with the Cleddau Project, a community project aimed at improving the River Cleddau.

NFU Roundtable

The Committee held roundtable discussions with members of NFU Cymru.

Upland farming

There was a lot of discussion about the specific requirements of upland farming, which is prevalent in Wales. One representative talked about the visible decrease in hefted flocks, and the species domination occurring on moorland as a result of undergrazing. The prevailing view was that, while reducing stocking densities is necessary in some instances, the focus should be on the right livestock in the right place.

In light of the recent wildfires, NFU members felt that it was particularly important the role of grazing in managing fuel load was recognised. They highlighted other benefits of grazing, including the benefits for soil and food production.

The social value payment available through the new Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) was seen as a positive, but there was concern over the lack of a replacement for the LFA payment which hill farmers had received under previous schemes. Representatives pointed to Scotland's Suckler Beef Support Scheme as a good example of support.

There was support for no-fence collars, and the potential they have to sustainably manage grazing.

The drop in livestock numbers was already having knock on effects. Representatives highlighted staff redundancies at larger abattoirs and the closure of smaller abattoirs as clear examples.

Overall, the sentiment was that schemes needed to support livestock numbers, without returning to headage payments which no one in the meeting supported.

Other issues

Difficulties with getting planning permissions were another key concern. In particular, NFU Cymru members had had issues getting planning permission for housing for cattle. For farmers who could not overwinter their stock outside, or for those who were now required to take the stock off the hills to manage grazing pressures, the need for planning permission was crucial.

Bovine TB remained a concern, as did the water quality regulations in Wales.

CLA Cymru Meeting

The Committee held a meeting with representatives from CLA Cymru.

CLA representatives had concerns over the forthcoming SPS deal. Although they were supportive of the reduction in border friction, they had concerns about the potential impact on farmers, particularly for arable farmers. The need for a reasonable implementation period was identified as the best way to make it workable for farmers, and for good communications and messaging so that farmers know what to expect.

Inheritance tax reform remained a concern for CLA members. They argued that farming is a low-yield business, not the wealth stronghold some politicians perceive it to be. They said it was vital that new entrants were able to enter the sector, but that this was not the instrument to achieve that.

The water quality regulations were another concern, with farmers reporting that the requirements were onerous and complex.

Farmers' Union of Wales Meeting

The Committee held a meeting with representatives from the Farmers' Union of Wales (FUW).

Livestock numbers were again a key concern; FUW reported that there had been a drop of around 30% in suckler beef production in Wales. As with other stakeholders, there was concern that removing stock from the hills was seen as a panacea, and FUW wanted to see a more holistic approach to landscape management.

There was a lot of concern about an environmental charity which owned land in Wales, and their approach to managing stocking densities on the land they let out to tenants. It was reported that the charity was waiting for tenancy agreements to end, then, when the successor tried to carry on the tenancy agreement, the allowed stocking numbers were lowered drastically. As a result, tenants were being forced to either sell their stock with clear business impacts, or not take on the tenancy, in some cases in places where their family had farmed for generations.

FUW also had concerns about the SPS and other trade deals. They had concerns over livestock transport, use of glyphosate, and cattle vaccines being restricted by future trade deals.

Again, water quality regulations were a concern. They felt that the current rules were a blunt instrument, and more targeted rules and support would be more effective. The rules on slurry storage alone were a huge cost for farmers, and getting the required planning was a challenge. They felt that the modelling Dwr Cymru uses for the closed period was outdated and needed a review.

Cleddau Project Meeting

The Committee met with the Cleddau Project, a grassroots group taking action to improve the quality of the river Cleddau, an SAC river in Pembrokeshire. The catchment is home to intensive dairy farms, which the project believes is having a clear impact on the river. Their aim is to work with farmers on a solution, rather than imposing rules. They plan to publish an academically rigorous report demonstrating the nutrient issues in the catchment, and work with local farmers to measure their nutrient footprint. They are keen to work with the industry, so that their work has impact.